

### Working towards a smoke-free world

New Year is usually the time we make those resolutions to change our less than ideal behaviour patterns – to exercise more, to eat more nutritious foods, to drink in moderation and to stop smoking.

However, with the stress that often accompanies the period around Christmas and New Year, a decision to stop smoking at that time is often difficult to keep.

So, May 31 is another opportunity. Each year it's designated worldwide as World No Tobacco Day; and it could be a good time to make your personal world smoke-free.

Up until a year or so ago, it was thought that stopping smoking completely – either cold turkey or with the help of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) – was the best way to ensure becoming a long term non-smoker. But this “quick stop” method doesn't suit everyone.

The “cut down then stop” (CDTS) method has now been given the official seal of approval. Recent evidence has shown that reducing the number of cigarettes smoked with the assistance of NRT, makes it easier for some heavily addicted smokers to ultimately quit completely.

There would hardly be a man, woman or even child in Australia who doesn't know about the dangers of smoking.

And this awareness has led to a slow but steady reduction in prevalence rates for smoking. The latest figures available show that just over 17% of all Australians now smoke – down only a couple of percentage points in the last few years, but down almost 7% since the early 1990's.

There are still more male smokers than female, however, amongst teenagers, more girls smoke than boys.

Smoking is arguably the greatest single preventable cause of death and disease in the world. Even passive smoking - inhaling someone else's second hand smoke - is a major problem. So why would anyone still be a smoker?

Well, there are probably many reasons why people begin to smoke – peer pressure is a particularly relevant factor in young women – and the reality is, once you start smoking it's mighty hard to stop. Nearly two thirds of smokers would like to stop smoking, but fewer than 1 in 20 people who try to quit will actually remain non-smokers after three months.

The problem, therefore, is not just beginning the quit process, but staying the distance as a non-smoker. If you are one of those thousands of Australians who want to stop smoking; if you're very willing, pretty much ready and just wanting to be enabled to quit for good, then these new strategies might make your job a whole lot easier.

Also, Nicorette brand of patches and gum has been approved for use as combination therapy. Previously the simultaneous use of more than one nicotine replacement therapy product was not considered appropriate. But experience has shown that some smokers who continue to have cravings with single therapy, or those who have quit in the past and then relapsed, will benefit and become long term quitters by using the patches and gum together.

As well, legislators have now recognised that nicotine replacement therapy can be a useful tool for just about everybody to assist with smoking cessation; that is everybody regardless of age, sex or medical history.

Up until recently we were reluctant to offer NRT to adolescents, pregnant or breast-feeding women and people with heart and blood vessel disease. But in fact, using nicotine replacement therapy to quit is always safer than continuing to smoke.

There are many myths and misconceptions about the effects of nicotine and NRT. Make sure you get the facts and the right advice on what products will suit you best. Ask for the fact cards on *Smoking and Staying a Non-smoker* from one of the pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society's Self Care health information. Phone 1300 369 772 or check out the website at [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) for the nearest location.